



## **Staff/Supervisory Ratios & Span of Control:**

### **Best Practices**

February 16, 2011

House File 171 would strike Iowa Code §8A.402(2)(g), repealing requirements for increasing the aggregate ratio of employees to supervisors in state executive branch agencies. The provision would otherwise mandate increasing the ratio to 15-to-1 by FY2012.

The Iowa Department of Corrections and district departments of correctional services are in favor of HF 171 and provide the following to support this position.

- 1. Iowa Department of Corrections institutions and community-based corrections residential facilities are 24x7 operations needing a different span of control than other, more office type operations.**

The size, design, age and mission of each of our facilities greatly impacts the number of supervisory staff needed for optimal functioning.

- 2. A low span of control is best practices for military-style organizations and appropriate for prisons due to the need to effectively manage in a crisis or emergency situation.**

The US Federal Government's National Incident Management System (NIMS) is based upon the Incident Control System (ICS) methodology developed by wildfire fighters to create a standard for command and control systems (hierarchy) as government agencies respond to incidents. NIMS and ICS both state that the maximum desirable span of control is 5, meaning that one supervisor should control no more than 5 subordinates. The US Military follows a similar formula: one commander controls three subordinate units, as well as a staff function, which results in a span of control of roughly 5. This military formula is virtually identical around the world--a time-tested formula for maximum span of control.

- 3. A low span of control enables effective implementation of best practices that reduces crime and keeps the public safe.**

*[T]he implementation of EBP has been credited with a significant reduction in the Iowa prison population. This is a trend that could be reversed if the span of control was increased. Supervisors play a pivotal role in any organization's attempt to improve efficiency and effectiveness through the application of evidence-based knowledge to the process of work.*

*In addition to ineffective implementation of evidence based practices, when supervision staff is lacking, it is also possible for programs and practices that are initially well-implemented to erode in quality over time. -- The Importance of a Low Span of Control in Effective Implementation of Evidence Based Probation and Parole Practices (Armstrong, G., et. al., Sam Houston State University, 2011).*

- 4. Experts recommend Iowa maintain the current 7-to-1 ratio for community-based corrections.**

*While recognizing ongoing fiscal demands, the current 7 probation officers to 1 supervisor ratio (7:1 span of control) should not be increased to a higher ratio, as it would be in contrast to suggested principles of organization and management, as well as challenge the continued implementation and sustainability of effective, evidence based practices within the System. -- The Importance of a Low Span of Control in Effective Implementation of Evidence Based Probation and Parole Practices (Armstrong, G., et. al., Sam Houston State University, 2011).*